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# Wema Takhtu, the graveyard near Almosi, and the end of an “Unknown” script

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**Abstract**
A newly discovered sacred compound in the Hissar Range close to Dushanbe in Tajikistan provided one inscription in the Bactrian script which mentions Wema Takhtu. In addition, there were found three inscriptions in one of the scripts met with in Gandhara labeled “unknown” or “undeciphered”. The script in question is already well-known from Dasht-e Nāwur. The paper shows that it is possible to read parts of the text with confidence since it runs parallel to the Bactrian inscription. The language appears to be Bactrian as well. A crucial term is Skt. *eḍūka* or *elūka*, denoting a stone construction for human remains. This turns the mountain site into a sort of graveyard, possibly with Wema Takhtu as an occupant.

**Keywords:**
Kushan epigraphy, Almosi inscriptions, Wema Takhtu, Mithraism, *eḍūka*, *elūka.*

In the latter part of 2022 Bobomullo Bobomulloev, a researcher from the Institute of History, Archaeology, and Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences of Tajikistan, followed hints of locals and found inscriptions on rock outcrops in the Hissar Range in the back of Hissar, near Dushanbe, at a height of close to 3000 m. From the town of Almosi (Алмоси, Davary “Almasi”) the river has to be followed northward for 20 km. The setting is a rectangular compound (fig. 1) of 120 to 50 meters (Bobomulloev 2022), oriented due southeast. The inscriptions are found at the southeastern corner.

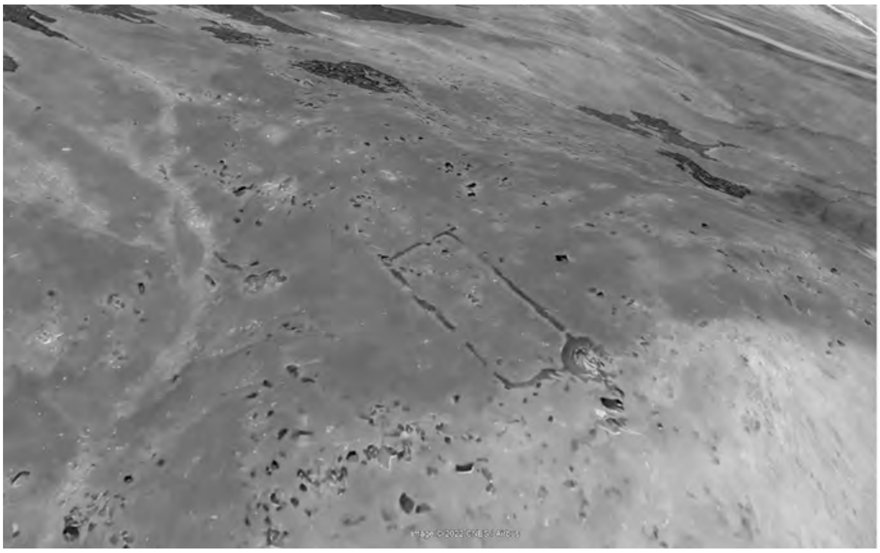

Fig. 1: Fenced-in compound in the mountains 50 km north of Hissar, Tajikistan, ca. 120 × 50 m, with the inscriptions in the south-eastern rock accumulation. (Google Earth)

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A separate slab found on the ground outside the compound carries an inscription in the well-known Bactrian script in nothing but capital letters. Three other inscriptions are chiseled on two different rocks. They belong to a small range of scripts found mainly in Gandhara labeled “unknown”, which means we do not know how to pronounce them and to which language they belonged. The script type in question was already known from Dasht-e Nāwur, 60 km west of Ghazni, 600 km south of the gorge of Almosi, likewise positioned high, at 4320 m above sea level (Fussman 1974: 6). The texts at Dasht-e Nāwur were written on order of Wema Takhtu, the son of Kujula Kadphises, the founder of the imperial Kushan line. His son Wema Takhtu started to rule no later than AD 90. The text at Dasht-e Nāwur is dated to 279 *yavana*, which must be close to AD 104. The new epigraph in Bactrian script carries his name as well and will not be dated far from AD 104.

As said, one of the inscriptions at Almosi is written in Bactrian letters (fig. 2), and pictures were sent to several specialists, of which Joe Cribb in London first read the name of Wema Takhtu and contacted Nicholas Sims-Williams, who then sent his reading to B. Bobomulloev, who published it online[1] on 16.11.2022 in the form of:

ΕΙΔΙΗΛΟ Υ…
ÞΑΟΝΑΝÞΑΕ ΟΟΗ-
ΜΟ ΤΑΚ-ΤΟΕ

translated as “This is the … of the king of kings, Vima Taktu.”

The site’s position high in the mountains, the distance and parallelism to Dasht-e Nāwur, and the clear reading of the name of OOHMO TAKTOE are sensational and would have deserved a more formal printed presentation. The work of the explorers is praiseworthy. This year, 2023, they will set out for further exploration and will hopefully chance upon more inscriptions.

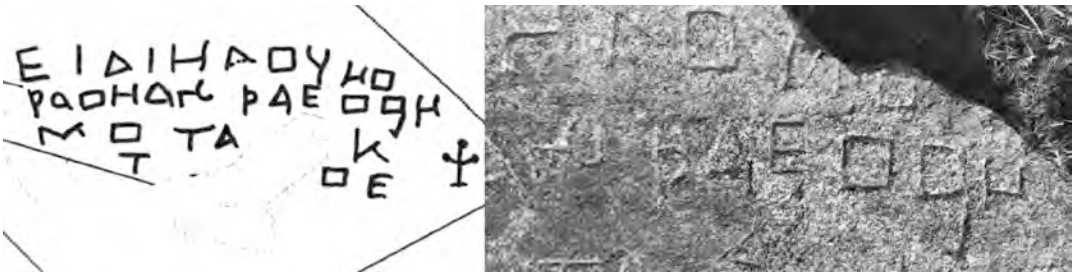

Fig. 2a/b: Eye-copy of the Bactrian text by Davary (2022: 15, Abb. 16) and photograph of the crucial part with the end of the second word and the diacritically marked *omicron* at the end of the second line (Davary 2022: 14, Abb. 14). Courtesy G.D. Davary.

Without knowing about the British colleagues already at work, the Afghan specialist in Germany, G.D. Davary, was contacted by the explorers too and provided with additional excellent photographs, so he published all the inscriptions (Davary 2022), offering an eye-copy and reading of the Bactrian one and showing the “unknown” three in photos and hand-drawn copies on transparent plastic sheets produced by the explorers. He refers to the Dasht-e Nāwur parallel and adds several artifacts that are inscribed in this or a related further enigmatic “unknown” script.

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[1] https://uclcaal.org/2022/11/16/discovery-of-inscriptions-in-the-almosi-gorge-tajikistan/

Davary’s reading of the Bactrian text is EIΔI HAOY(N)O ÞAONAN[O] ÞAE OOHMO TAKTOE. The difference lies in the reconstructed second word ηαουνο which he links to Persian أيوان *eyvān*, “terrace, palace, porch, veranda.” Meaning and geographical situation make a good match, but the linguistic development from *ēauno* to *eiwān* or vice-versa is problematic. From a purely paleographical point of view, the reading of a *ny* (ν/N) in the one-but-last position seems more difficult. We will come back to this.

It is not amazing that this script was unknown for so long, although the links to Kharoṣṭhī are obvious and have been noted earlier more than once. In between the letters with clear Kharoṣṭhī affiliation, many others are not derived from this script. Therefore, affinities to the Aramaic script have been proposed too (Fussman 1974). But neither Kharoṣṭhī nor any Semitic script of the area is of any help without a sort of Rosetta stone, which would present two identical texts in two scripts. When I was invited to comment on Davary’s work I expressed the hope that our short text in Bactrian letters would provide this tool, and learned from a British colleague that a Russian colleague had already tried to link all relevant texts, but to no avail.

That would have been it, if not for a very simple idea, that turned up shortly later: The Bactrian text from Almosi contained the phrase *šaonan-šae*, which means two times *ša* and twice *na* in close succession. If there was a parallel then it should instantly be recognized through two identical letters side by side.

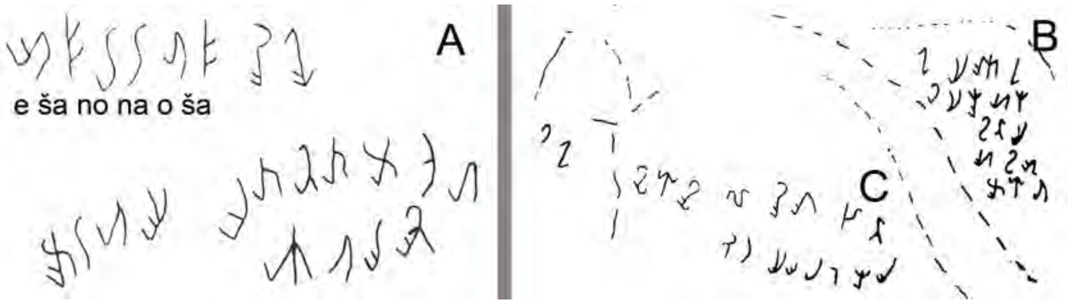

Fig. 3a/b: Tracings on transparent plastic foil: A) Inscription which mentions Wema Takhtu, B) and C) two series of letters close to each other on the vertical side of a sort of altar rock. Courtesy G.D. Davary.

A look at the hand-drawn tracings made it instantly clear, that there is one single phrase comparable to *šaonan šae* in inscription A (Fig. 3a), first line. Not only would the positions of the *na*s and *ša*s agree, but in confirmation, the two *na*s have the classical form of the dental *na* as found in Aśokan and later Kharoṣṭhī. If the two *na*s are part of *śaonano,* then the two *śa*s should also be there and look similar. There are two identical letters at the expected places. In addition, the vowels can be defined: the *-o* is a stroke pointing upwards to the left from the lowest point of the letter, and the letter *o* is constructed from an initial letter *a*, applying the same principle of variance as in Kharoṣṭhī.

In the Unknown script, the two letters preceding *śaonano* will most likely be related to EI-DI in the Bactrian form. It seems that the first letter is again a basic vowel with the left leg shortened, and with three short strokes at the bottom, the two of an *-e* and a third turning the *-e* into an *-ei* or *-ai.* On the same basis, the following letter is *da,* with an *-e* attached below.

In case the Bactrian text continues after *šae*, then we can expect something like *wema takto* here as well and it should contain two *ta*s close to each other. This way the next line can be analyzed as *o-w*-mo to-ko-to-e*, the latter of which would produce *toktoe*, provided that the second *-o* can (but need not) indicate, as in Bactrian spelling, that there is no vowel to be pronounced at all. The *-e* at the end has a counterpart in the form TAKTOE on the Bactrian slab. In confirmation, the *to-ko-to-e* is also found at Dasht-e Nāwur (cf. Fig. 5) where the first *-o* is missing and the last vowel is *o*, so that *taktoo* can be read and the Almosi spelling be regarded as containing a clerical slip regarding its first character.

On the Bactrian stone, we read *owēmo* because the first O is different from the second O in that the latter has received a strong vertical line starting from its lower right corner (Fig. 2b, right end of the second line), not commented upon in the editions as published. But this stroke was intended, it is strong and singular. This under-stroked *omicron* compares to the *vi* in *uvima* at Khalatse and the *vha* in *vhema* at Dasht-e Nāwur, both in Kharoṣṭhī. A third case is a diacritical understroke or underbend in *v̱ima* in the Khar. lettering of Wima Kadphises on his coins, which often led to a transcription *hima.* This second letter – or rather the sound behind it – was regarded as difficult to render. Most likely it was a sort of bilabial, not present in the local Gāndhārī vernaculars. For the bearers of the name, its rendering was felt desirable, but for its graphical representation, various methods were devised by different scribes. In addition, a simple method was resorted to too: On the gold coins mentioning Wema Takhtu, the vowel and the semivowel are simply given the same shape: ΒΑϹΙΛΕΩϹ ΟΟΕΝΟ ΤΑΚΤΟΟΥ, and ΒΑϹΙΛΕΥϹ ΟΟΕΜΟ ΚΑΔΦΙϹΗϹ.

In the Bactrian legend, the third letter is an *ēta,* H, together with the understroked *omicron* it built *wē,* and the beginning of the word should have sounded */owē/.* The correspondent sequence in the Unknown script starts with an *o*, formally an *a* with the single *o*-stroke attached. The next letter in the Unknown script looks like our rounded E mirrored to the left. It could stand for the bilabial, *wē, wī*, or *wi* alone. Parallels are needed to answer the question. At Dasht-e Nāwur (Fig. 5) the letter is segregated in two lines.

The last letter must be *ma,* but it looks like Khar. *ti.* This is the classic difference between Kharoṣṭhī and the Aramaic and younger Semitic scripts (Falk 1996: 8): the same form is read *m* in Aramaic (*mem*) and *ti* in Kharoṣṭhī. If it is not a mere accident, this shows that whoever designed this new script for Wema Takhtu, must have known the Aramaic or another Semitic script, if only cursorily. This is quite an amazing fact around AD 100.

After OWHMO and *o*wēmo* we can reasonably expect *taktu*,[2] where *k* could also be *kh* and *u* could be *o*, but in any case, the third letter must be identical to the first. And this is what we get. This shows us that the shape of the letter *ta* is rather close in shape to the Brāhmī *ta.*

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[2] This is the most frequently cited spelling, but more archaic is *takhtu*, found on coins and an inscription, and this led to the Indian Brāhmī form of *takṣu*; cf. Falk 2009 *passim*, for *takṣu* Falk ed. 2015: 108.

This accordance between the string of characters and the expected sounds is too wide to have arisen by chance.

What we still need is the second word in the Bactrian script, naming the character of the site, where Davary thought of a “terrace” and Sims-Williams signaled unsafe readings. In the Unknown script, we find a word at the end of the sentence and we can check whether the two will match.

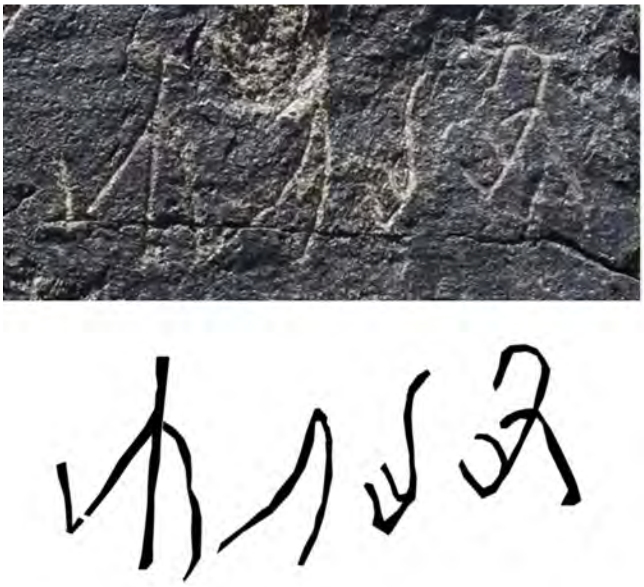

Fig. 4: Last line right of Almosi A with the first two letters taken as initial *e*, corrected to its short form, and *lo* miswritten as *ne*.

Davary is probably right in assuming that the related site at Dasht-e Nāwur was used to celebrate the rising of the sun, at a certain time of the year.[3] The place at Almosi could have a similar function and this leads to the suspicion that the enigmatic word in the Bactrian text starting with HΛ could be aspirated, so that /hēl/ should refer to *hēlios*, the sun.[4] If we look at the Unknown script we see at the start of the fourth line a letter similar to a Kharoṣṭhī *ha* with the two strokes of an -*e* attached below. But, welcome as it would be, this letter is no real *ha+e*, it looks like one of the long-drawn initial vowels, as in *eide* or at the end of *tokotoe*. But here a hook was added reaching down to the baseline. This hook seems to correct the long-drawn vowel into one of the standard free-standing vowels starting from a short, Λ-like base. I can see no reason for the existence of two forms of the free-standing vowel, but the duplicity seems to be real. So it might be wiser to take the first letter not as a *he*, but as a “corrected” initial *e*.

After the *lambda* Λ, the Bactrian text continues clearly with OY, and so on the “Unknown script” side a *lu* would be most welcome, but all we see looks rather like a *ne*. Since we do not know how a /la/ was rendered we can only speculate whether this *ne* is a clerical slip or hides something we do not know yet.[5] We will return to the problem.

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[3] These inscriptions can be read when the reader approaches the rock from the north, looking south.

[4] Greek *helios* has found entry in Indic vernaculars as *hela,* at least once in Helagupta *(helaüta),* a personal name in Gandhara (Falk 2014: 5), son of a Demetrius *(demetria),* in a text from the same late first century AD. More frequent are *heli* and *helika,* cases are collected by Humbach (1978: 241, fn. 40).

[5] If *la* in the Unknown script resembled a Khar. *la,* then it had one arm attached in the middle and to the left of a long vertical. Together with an Unknown script medial -*o* it had two arms to the left. With the complete text written on a sheet for the stone mason, this letter may have been mistaken by the latter as showing the two strokes of a medial -*e*.

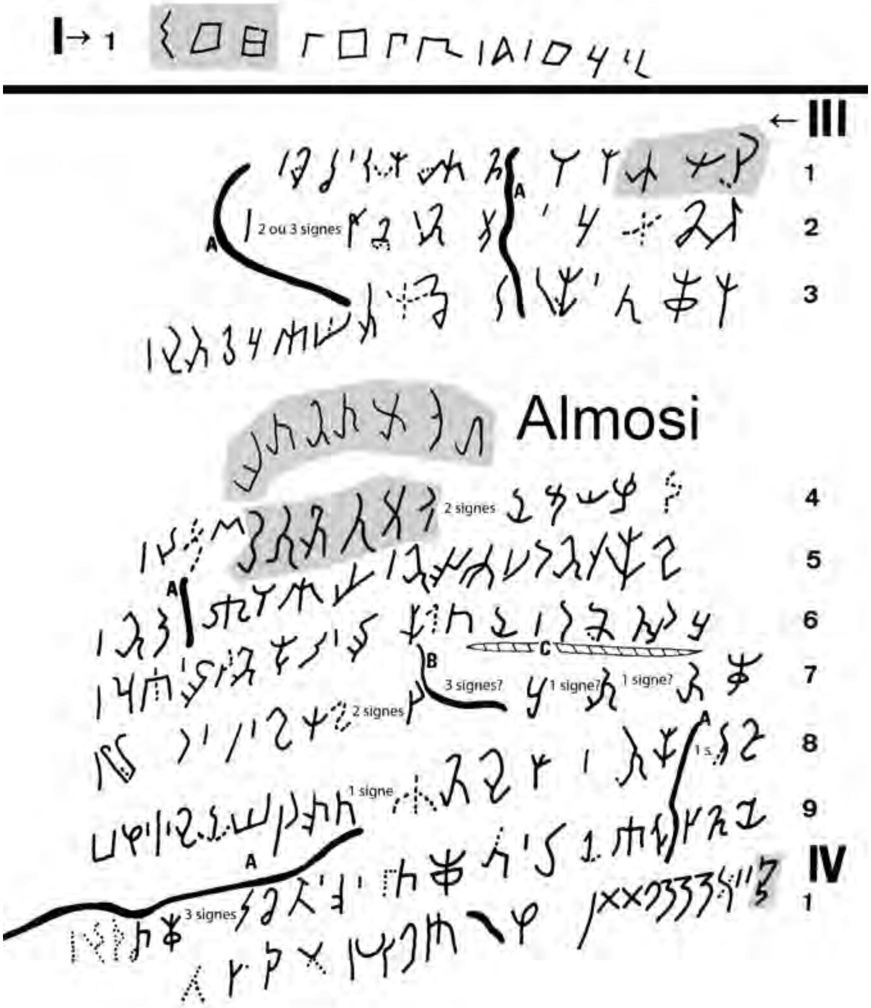

Fig. 5: The Unknown script text at Dasht-e Nāwur in the edition of G. Fussman. Highlighted are the three initial letters (III,1), taken here as equivalent to the Bactrian ΣΟΘ, and the *saṃ* of the Khar. version (IV,1:1). Inserted are the Almosi letters read as *uwimo tokotoe* above //wima takotoo*. After Fussman 1974.

In the Bactrian inscription, the next letter is truncated in its upper part. Two lines survive in the lower half, one slanting to the right and a centrally positioned vertical line. N. Sims-Williams (personal communication) thinks of an *alpha* A without its cross-bar, an omission that is not singular. The Unknown script counterpart has a clear *a* in the third place so that the proposed restitution of the Bactrian letter receives support. Remains the final fourth letter, which is a square again, but the stone above it is broken away. With good reason, this square is taken by Davary as another *omicron*, but being a square it could as well be the lower half of a *thēta* (Fig. 5, third letter top right), which itself would require another omicron square following. The stone is damaged and only an *in situ* inspection could affirm or exclude or leave open the existence of one further letter. *A priori*, reading without a *thēta* appears more appropriate.

Keeping all possibilities in view, we end up with HΛOYAO or, less likely, HΛOYA[Θ](O). The Unknown script can help. It shows a so far undefined letter ending in -*o*, at least according to the modern tracing through the plastic foil. This undefined letter looks like a triangle open at the bottom and crossed lengthwise. Such a letter is seen at

Dasht-e Nāwur, which has this letter as its third, in the first line right at the start. The first letter of this first line looks close to a Khar. *sa*. This *sa* at the beginning of the text (Fig. 5) compares to the Greek alphabetic number Σ *sigma* opening the Bactrian text (I,1:3), but it could also have the function of the *saṃ* introducing the additive year number in the Kharoṣṭhī version (IV,1:1), as an abbreviation of *saṃvatsare*, meaning "in the year #". The Unknown script does not use an additive year number system comparable to the Khar. version; however, it could copy the Bactrian formula which uses *sigma* for 200, *omicron* for 70 plus *thēta* for 9. If the unknown script also applies the Greek method, its *sa* would be 200, the next letter that resembles a Khar. *mi* would stand for *omicron*, and the last letter needed to be *thēta* parallel to the Greek year number, and it is this third letter that has a parallel in the word in question at Almosi. If we try to apply the parallelism we get *eneatho*, not far from ΗΛΟΥ[ΑΘ](Ο), and the only irritating pair is the unmistakable ΛΟΥ and its counterpart read *ne*. Is this difference enough to assume two languages with two different words?

Although a *thēta* would thus provide a match, we have to consider a *thēta*-less Bactrian reading too. In comparison, ΗΛΟΥΑΘΟ spelled four syllables, in unison with what the Unknown script text reads. If only ΗΛΟΥΑΟ was written, then the last Ο could be more or less silent, indicating in writing that the word ends in A and stands in the nominative. This would mean comparing a three-syllabic ηλουα against a four-syllabic ηλουαθο. The final -θο definitely present in the Unknown script must then express a difference, probably relevant to the meaning.

Fortunately, there is a word used for a short period that sounds very similar. It is spelled *eḍūka/aiḍūka* or *elūka/ailūka* and has no clear Indic background,[6] but it appears in India with the first stages of the Maitreya or Mitraka cult. It denotes a construction of stone that serves to preserve the remnants of human beings, be it the complete skeleton or bones collected in pots.[7] As shown above (cf. *BPPB* vol. XV. *Śāntamatiḥ*, p. 97) this habit could have been introduced during a sort of epidemic. Objects serving such a function depicted in plastic art are found in Gandhāra and Swat, much less in mainland India. The final -*ka* is present in Sanskrit; in Prakrit, the *k* is missing, as we see in *gāmelua* for *grāmelūka*.[8] If Indic *elūka/elua* and our ηλουα are related we are left with the last syllable, probably -*tho,* which in Prakrit can stand only for Skt. -*stha,* "standing, placed in", or, as in *sthapati,* denoting a "place". With this meaning the more commonly used form is *sthāna.* If we think of a hypothetical *elūka-stha(na)* we had a "place for relics." This recalls the words of Bobomulloev: "in the northern part, one-third of the area inside the stone structure is occupied by a burial ground, where there are more than 40 burials of various sizes." According to Davary (2022: 4), one of the tumuli was opened and a skeleton of a person on his back came to the fore. Seen this way, the inscription in the Unknown script would say that it was Wema Takhtu who created this burial ground.

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[6] No offer in the classic etymological dictionaries. Could the term come from the north? Cf. Tocharian B *erkau* "graveyard", with the discussion in Adams 1999 and 2013 s.v.

[7] The indigenous dictionaries from the Amarakośa onwards stress the fact that bones remaining after incineration *(kīkasa)* are cast into an *eḍūka* (*eḍūkaṃ yad antarnyastakīkasam*).

[8] Mṛcchakaṭikā 97,1; cf. Edgerton BHS Dict. s.v. *grāmeluka.*

Content and term would make a perfect match, but we have to expect an Indian term in its Prakrit form (*-ka* to *-a*; *-stha* to *-tha*) which was as such transported to Bactria. There, HLOYA probably remained as short-termed and group-related as its counterpart *elūka* in Indian languages. Given the activities of Wema Takhtu in India, his last conquests reaching down to Mathura, the many depictions of *elūka*s in Gandhāra and Swat, and the idea of *eḍūka/elūka* constructions predominant within the Maitreya cult, we can only wonder at the unity of aspects as found on the mountain slope above Hissar. The irritating *ne* instead of required *lo* will be nothing more than a clerical slip, produced by a stone mason too ignorant to properly copy *lo* or *ḍo*. The final *-tho,* missing or not, will be dealt with below.

We saw that all words of the Bactrian text are also found in the Unknown Script text 1. But there are two words more, to the lower left in the fourth line. With what we believe to know we read [?]*eo name*. The latter word could relate to "venerate", Skt. *namati* or *namo.* For the first word *deo* suggests itself, but this interpretation is impeded by the letter *da* from the first word *eide* where it looks different. Alternatively, we could think of *theo*, but the *thēta* has already been defined, looking different as well. On a trial basis, I propose *reo*, which could be Bactrian ρηο, "rich", used in compounds, as in *bagorēo*, "the rich god", who is seen by Sims-Williams (2010: 41, § 54) as "Mithra? or the Moon? or the Sun?". Two of the three options match our inscription.

Accepting all proposals for the moment, the whole inscription would read:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| *eide śaonano śae* | compares to | ΕΙΔΙ ... ÞΑΟΝΑΝ ÞΑΕ |
| *ow*imo tokotoe* | | OWHMO TAKTOE |
| *eneatho* | | HLOYA[O] |
| *reo name* | | |

So, until a better solution is found I translate our parallel texts as:

Unknown script: "This place for relics is (the work) of Wema Taktu."
Bactrian script: "These are the relics of Wema Taktu. Veneration to the Rich one.",

The different place in the sentence of e**lua-tho* compared to HLOYA[O] as well as the added *-tho* seem to derive from the different objects carrying the inscriptions. The Unknown script inscription is chiseled on a large and immovable rock. People learn that the *eneatho*, read as **eluatho*, Skt. **elūkasthāna*, which means the walls of the whole compound were piled up on the order of king Wema Takhtu, almost 300 running meters, so massive that it is visible for a space camera. In contrast, the Bactrian text puts the king's name last. The text is not written on a part of a big rock, but on a slab, which was found 25 m below and outside the compound. Davary[9] thought that a boulder bursting through natural decay threw the slab this far. A simpler solution would assume that the slab had its present shape already on the day it was inscribed. One letter succumbed to the weaker upper edge, but as a consequence, the scribe circumvented all apparent flaws in the stone so that the name of Wema Takhtu covers a major part of the lower half. A man willing to take this slab away, quite recently,[10] is enough to explain the 25 m distance to the boulders, where he or they decided that the stone was too heavy and dropped it where it was found by Bobomulloev. When the stone always had its present shape then its most likely original place will have been on the tumulus covering the remnants of Wema Takhtu himself, saying in Bactrian script "this is Wema's *elūka*", while the large boulder states in the Unknown script that "this *elūka*-site (was made at the command) of Wema."

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[9] Davary (2022: 4:) "durch die Witterungsverhältnisse aus dem Felsen gerissen und in eine Tiefe von 25m zu Boden geschleudert ...".

The next step would be to read the other two inscriptions based on what we believe to know (Fig. 6): the dentals *ta tha da na* (*dha* missing), the labial *ma* (*pa, pha/fa, ba, bha* missing), the sibilants *ša sa*, the initial vowels *a* and its variants *ai, o, e*, the medial vowels *-e, -o, -u* (*-i* missing, if not hidden behind *-e*). No cerebrals, but *ra*, while *ya* and *ha* are missing. We also know that consonant clusters can be expressed by the use of a "silencing" *-o*, derived from habits developed for the Bactrian orthography. However, all this is not sufficient to propose readings for the remaining two inscriptions, apart from an *ede* in the middle of the upper line of text 3, which could be a variant of our initial *aide.*

We may want to have a look at Dasht-e Nāwur (Fig. 5), where the same king had similar and larger texts inscribed. The site is again on a mountain, the texts come with a date. Despite the many letters we have identified, some with certainty and some with some probability, I can only find the name of Wema Takhto in line 4 at the end, rather similar to how the name was put into writing at Almosi.

At Dasht-e Nāwur the useful phrase *śaonano śao* cannot be found, although it exists in the Bactrian version as *šaonande šai* (Sims-Williams 1995/96: 95) and as *rajatiraja* in the Khar. version, where *vhema kuśa* follows as the name.

The free-standing vowel, *a*, used with diacritical marks for *o* or *e*, is seen several times in the short inscription Almosi A, but it is completely absent at Dasht-e Nāwur. Regarding such vowels, only the final *-e* or *-o* of *takotoo* and *tokotoe* are parallel in their long-drawn shape, and so I conclude that the initial vowel first had the long-drawn shape, and then was transformed into its short form. This points at a chronological priority of Dasht-e Nāwur, while Almosi A would come later, as it presupposes the attempt to introduce a new form. Almosi B is short too, and it is very nicely incised. It starts with a long-drawn vowel, while its fourth line starts with a small shaped *e*. In addition, among its 18 characters, three so far undefined ones occur more than once, but none of them occurs in Almosi A. Of these three, two occur also at Dasht-e Nawar, but one, an inverted N (И), with vowel strokes for *-e* and *-o*, is not present in the south, as if it was a new creation as well.

This concerns the relative priority or posterity of two texts written in scripts of the "Unknown" sort. For the Bactrian script, a similar impression arises. The development of the letter for *ša* can be observed over almost two centuries (Falk 2022: 167). A *thorn*-like form of a single Þ was reached only in the late years of Wema Takhtu and became standard under Wima Kadphises. The Almosi text in the modified Greek script shows such a single Þ with closed and lowered half-circle in both possible cases, while in its stead, Dasht-e Nāwur still adds the older open rectangular arm.

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[10] Bobomulloev 2022: "According to our informant Sanginov Khaitali, when he was here for the first time there were many more inscriptions."

Both scripts thus suggest that Almosi is younger, or later than Dasht-e Nāwur. If later than AD 104 the texts must have been written before the first preserved date of Wima Kadphises, that is 287 *yavana,* eight years after 279, that means before AD 112. A date within the span from AD 104 to 112 appears quite reasonable for Almosi, but should not be taken as unimpeachable. Scripts can develop very differently at places so wide apart as the 600 km between our two mountain sanctuaries.

The many changes apparent within the short text of Almodi A show that the Unknown script was not stable, but developed variants soon, possibly with every new scribe. We can also try to look back in search of the origins. Two inscriptions are often put into one pot with Dasht-e Nāwur. One is on a silver cup, found in Issyk, Kasachstan, said to date to the fourth century BC, way before Wema Takhtu, found in a sanctuary again high in the mountains. The place is 70 km north of lake Issykkül, 900 km ENE of Almosi, in an area with no Kushan history at all. The second piece is a former sheet of silver, cut down to scrap metal. It was found in the emptied treasure house at Ai Khanum on the Oxus, a Graeco-Bactrian city that was deserted around 145 BC, again long before Wema Takhtu. There are some similarities between the scripts on these two silver pieces (Davary 2022: 8, 10), but there are also substantial differences and it can safely be said that both are probably distant ancestors of the "Unknown" script. In contrast to the Almosi texts, those two could also hide languages of non-Iranian stock. Using any of the two to explain our Unknown script could lead to unreliable results.

One may wonder why it was felt necessary to create a new script when the result looks still so close to Kharoṣṭhī. It seems that Khar. as it was or with some minimal alterations would have been sufficient for the purpose to create an "own" script. The reason may be related to religion: Wema Takhto was close to the Iranian Mithra, who is decidedly non-Buddhist. Using Khar. might have made it necessary to ask or employ Buddhist monks to supervise non-Buddhist institutions. With the new script, Wema Takhtu was independent and could write and formulate according to his taste. When Dasht-e Nāwur was added to the conquests, Gandhara was too close to ignore a Kharoṣṭhī reading populace. But the differences in diction, the almost sloppy *vhema kuśa* instead of Takhtu, shows that the Kharoṣṭhī scribes felt independent.[11] Maybe the dislike was mutual. On his *sōtēr megas* coinage, no Kharoṣṭhī letter is found.

What sort of person was Wema Takhtu? We can imagine how much energy it needed to unify all currencies current in the realm created by his father Kujula to the one copper edition signed "*sōtēr megas*" in his empire that stretched from Bactria to Mathura. We can be sure that a similar energy would have been needed to spread his personal script inside and outside the Kharoṣṭhī-writing world. The enterprise brought forth only meager results, at least when we tell from what evidence survives to this day. The Buddhists had their Kharoṣṭhī script, but some monks also knew our Unknown script. The result is waterpots from some monasteries which apart from ownership legends in Kharoṣṭhī and Brāhmī also show a few letters of the Unknown script. Well-documented are the rare examples from Kara-Tepe, some by Vertogradova (last 2004), some by

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[11] If my surmise (Falk ed. 2015: 100f.) is correct that *vhema kuśa* is the base of the Chinese spelling 閻膏珍 yan-gao-zhen then this form of the name was not so rare as it seemed from Dasht-e Nāwur alone.

Fussman (2011a,I,2: 233f.),[12] collected by Nasim Khan (2007: 111).

For the moment, one of the “Unknown scripts” of the early AD centuries is not unknown anymore; however, it is also not known in full. Important is the analysis of its linguistic nature: it does not hide a text in an unknown language, which was thought to be an idiom used by the Yuezhi at home, being unrelated to Bactrian or Gāndhārī.[13] G. Fussman (2011a: 133) expressed the *opinio communis*: “All we can say at the moment about these inscriptions is that the letters are clearly derived from the Kharoṣṭhī and that their language was one of those spoken in Bactria, but probably not the Bactrian language which was written in Greek letters.” (transl. HF)

Thanks to the Tajik scholars we can now modify this impression. Like Aśoka, whose texts are written identically in sound in the Brāhmī and Kharoṣṭhī scripts, also Wema Takhtu had two similar texts written in the Greek-based Bactrian script, and in the Kharoṣṭhī-based formerly “Unknown script 1”, which I would like to christen “Wema Takhtu script”, short as WT script, because, for the time being, it seems that it is intimately connected with this king. The graveyard site at Almosi was probably visited by Wema Takhtu in person, as was Dasht-e Nāwur. The place high in the mountains oriented southeast reinforces the impression that the Mithra- or sun cult was a vital element in the policy of this king from the late first century onward.

What is presented here is just an open door to a house full of remaining problems. The inventory of the WT script needs to be completed, and it seems that the script soon took on a rather unrestrained development, with numerous variants cropping up, each one in need of an individual explanation. The Buddhists had an eye on Kharoṣṭhī; forms developed and the inventory was enhanced, but never got out of control. After the demise of the founder such an institution was not active for the WT script, and the missing authority led to its soon and well-deserved end.

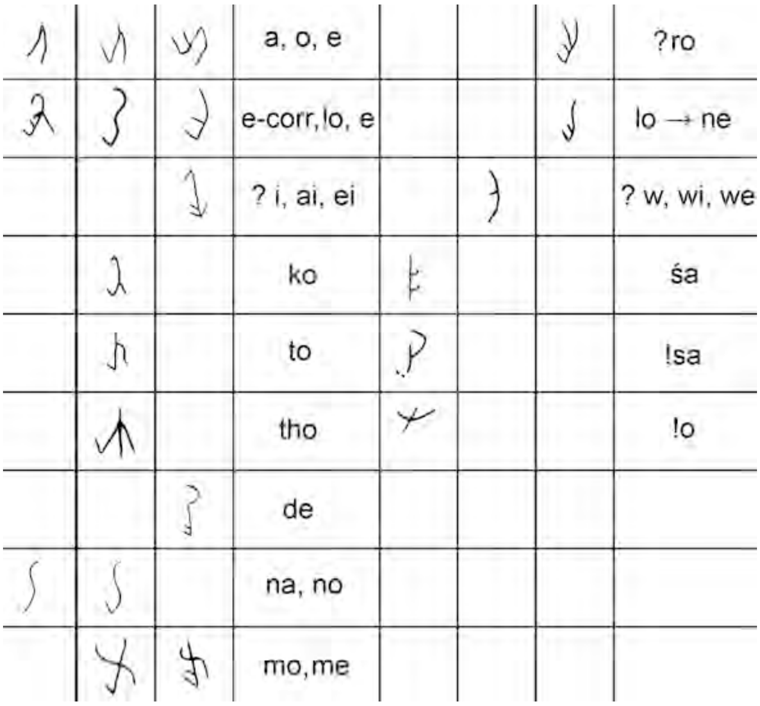
a, o, e
?ro
e-corr,!o, e
lo → ne
? i, ai, ei
? w, wi, we
ko
śa
to
!sa
tho
!o
de
na, no
mo,me

Fig. 6: List of characters recognized in this paper. An initial question mark indicates uncertainty, an initial exclamation mark shows that the example is drawn from the Dasht-e Nāwur text.

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[12] Not all of the eight examples given belong to this category. On the contrary, sherd “169 KT” could read WT “*...soma*”, rather than Khar. *ṇadhari*.

[13] Some authors are listed in Fussman 2011b.

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